

Oral Questions

Mr. Dan Heap (Trinity—Spadina): My question is whether the minister is trying to discontinue that record.

I have a further supplementary. Will the minister propose, as has been much asked for publicly, amendments to the Immigration Act to provide for a review of board decisions that are challenged?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Board decisions can now be challenged by appeal with leave to the Federal Court of Canada. That system is working well. But I have received representations from different groups. As we speak, my department is looking at ways of trying to improve the refugee determination system. Once we have conducted that review and consulted with members, we can then seize the government of proposals and make decisions at that time.

* * *

[Translation]

COURT CHALLENGES PROGRAM

Mr. Jean—Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Madam Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Justice, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. Recently, the Minister of Justice received a letter from Mrs. Bertha Wilson, a retired judge of the Supreme Court of Canada, in which Mrs. Wilson expressed her consternation at the Conservative Government's decision to abolish the Court Challenges Program. She said the program was praiseworthy, imaginative and well managed.

At a time when Canadians are rethinking their Constitutional future, why should the government abolish a program that was seen as essential to making the courts accessible for women, aboriginal people, racial minorities, language and ethnic groups—all of whom know rights are an illusion unless they can go to court to defend those rights? How will the Prime Minister bring this program back?

Hon. Gerry Weiner (Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship): I agree with everything the hon. member said, Madam Speaker. This program was very beneficial, but after nearly 300 cases, according to my information, we have now created a certain body of jurisprudence. That is what the program was for, and it was not necessarily meant to be in place for another 10 years.

• (1500)

[English]

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Acting Minister of Justice. It also concerns the Court Challenges Program.

The minister has suggested that this kind of program could be handled by the government itself. In this case the government would find itself challenging and defending the law at the same time. This would obviously be a conflict of interest for the government.

How exactly does the minister propose to deal with this problem?

Hon. Gerry Weiner (Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship): Madam Speaker, as I said, the Court Challenges Program was an excellent program, a made in Canada initiative, to really examine the laws for their fairness, the equality in language laws that were in place. It has done that very fairly. But, after almost 300 cases of jurisprudence that have been established, one would imagine that we now have a significant volume of jurisprudence.

Whether a program must go on forever should be determined now either by other jurisdictions which have a responsibility, or by the private sector, if there is such an interest.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Joy Langan (Mission—Coquitlam): The federal government is pulling out of the Fraser River debris control program at the same time it is hosting in Vancouver the Environment '92 conference and at the same time it plans to announce the Fraser River Basin Protection Program agreement between the federal, provincial and municipal governments.

My question is to the parliamentary secretary for the environment. How can the government rationalize abandoning this critical debris control program in less than two weeks in light of its anticipated Fraser River protection program announcement?

Mr. Lee Clark (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Madam Speaker, as you know, the federal government announced in one of approximately 50 initiatives under the green plan, that it would be